

The Art of Life Series

# *Human Equipment*

By Edward Howard Griggs

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## The Art of Life Series



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## *Human Equipment*

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR:*

MORAL EDUCATION

THE NEW HUMANISM

A BOOK OF MEDITATIONS

THE USE OF THE MARGIN



THE ART OF LIFE SERIES  
*Edward Howard Griggs, Editor*

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# Human Equipment

ITS USE AND ABUSE

BY

EDWARD HOWARD GRIGGS

"The technical work of our time, which is done to an unprecedented perfection, has, by increasing and multiplying objects of luxury, given the favorites of fortune a choice between more leisure and culture upon the one side, and additional luxury and good living, but with increased activity, upon the other; and, true to their character, they choose the latter, and prefer champagne to freedom."—*Schopenhauer*.

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## *Human Equipment*

THIS brief study deals with the problem of the right use of things — that problem of man's relation to his material equipment which, like the poor, is always with us, growing increasingly difficult as civilization develops. We become acutely conscious of this problem in times of business stress, but the true causes of the suffering that arouses us lie further back in our conduct during periods of prosperity. Thus the problem is one of universal import, with application to life in every time.

Life would be simple and its issues easily solved if it were statical and not growing. Had we to deal only with fixed factors and relations, the need would be merely to deduce rightly the law of these and then ever after apply

it. Life is, however, not statical but dynamic, a growth-process going on endlessly. Thus we have to deal with constantly changing factors and relations, and the rule which worked so well yesterday does not at all apply to-day. As history never repeats itself in the larger world, the swing of the pendulum ever returning on a somewhat different plane, so in personal life just the same situation never twice occurs. The old elements may all be present, but they are in ever new combination; and the fresh equation of old forces cannot be anticipated. Thus the problem can never be solved by rule; great principles indeed always apply, but the application must be made freshly to each concrete case. This, indeed, is why life is always a fine art and can never be reduced to exact science. While man lives he grows, and in the growth itself is the life. The problem consists thus in maintaining, at every point, an unstable equi-

librium. We may fail in either of two opposite directions: if life becomes static and fixed, it settles into a blind routine that is death; if we lose the equilibrium, there results a destructive riot of disordered forces. Life demands preserving the equilibrium, but maintaining or even increasing the instability as growth proceeds.

The opposing types of failure can both be traced in every aspect of life. In politics, the one form is shown in the stagnation that marked China for thousands of years, the other is seen in the wild chaos of a French Revolution. In religion, the one is dead formalism, the other an ungoverned riot of feeling and imagination. In art, the one tendency ends in the dry artifice of the pseudo-classic, the other in the excesses of unbalanced romanticism. In conduct, the one failure is slavish conventionality; the other is unrestrained expression of every impulse and desire.

Man's spirit seems to oscillate between these extremes: on the one side a Sahara desert of dead routine, on the other a tropical jungle of wasteful recklessness. It might be suggested that the desert is worse than the jungle, since it is mere death, while the jungle contains the good and the bad growing side by side in profligate fecundity; but either is deadly compared to the life that ever grows in balanced harmony.

Aristotle was probably aware of these opposing types of failure in working out his theory of virtue as a mean between two extremes. His theory is a groping in the right direction, but does not adequately meet the issue, for the desirable "mean" is not half-way between two extremes, but includes the truth on both sides. What we want is growth *and* equilibrium, not something between the two. The highest life is never a compromise between opposing forces, but an inclusion of them in a higher

unity. It is order *and* freedom that is required, not a mean between them. If order be destroyed, freedom becomes license; if freedom be abrogated, order becomes tyranny. Thus both principles must be present, contained in a higher union, in the true society. So in art, both significance and harmony are required, not a compromise that misses at once deep meaning and perfect beauty.

The supreme application of this law is to the relation of man to his material equipment. Man's whole existence rests on this equipment, developed by his labor acting on the resources of Nature. Man cannot create something out of nothing. The raw material is all furnished by the earth on which he lives; but this material is transformed by human toil and intelligence into the countless tools and furnishings of life. There is no other material wealth; and no matter how refined and complicated the life of a cultivated society may be,

all that it utilizes has been obtained from the two sources — man's work on the basis of Nature's gifts.

We can readily trace, through the past, the steady and amazing increase in this equipment of civilization, from primitive times unto to-day. Indeed, this increase in wealth is often taken to be the main test of progress; as, truly, in right relation to life, it is the most coarsely obvious evidence of that progress. The popular conception of civilization in contrast to barbarism is largely in terms of fine houses, clothes, theaters, museums, industrial buildings and railway trains. How false this standard may become we shall soon see; meantime, its all but universal acceptance indicates how impressive the ceaseless growth of this human equipment is.

It is during the last hundred years that this growth has been most astounding. To consider only two of the myriad inventions and discoveries of the



last century: note how the use of steam and electricity as means of communication and transportation has transformed the whole objective aspect and problem of the world's life. The modern city has become, in consequence, a totally different thing from the city of a century ago. Vastly expanded in physical extent; the groups of its population much more rigorously segregated — the rich in comfortable surroundings in one end of the community, the poor heaped in tenement-vats in the other, with the better middle class distributed in the countryside for thirty miles round about; the business center of the whole a thronging hive by day, a silent tomb at night: the modern city presents overwhelming problems that could not even have been guessed by the wildest flight of imagination a hundred years ago.

The miracles of invention that progressively transform the problem are accepted as commonplace in a few months.

A subway-system is installed that doubles the area a city such as New York may conveniently occupy and changes every aspect of its social and industrial activities: three months after its opening let a stoppage of its trains occur for a few hours, and men grumble in resentment as if deprived of some natural right such as fresh air or sunshine.

Is it, then, right to take this measureless increase in human equipment as a sufficient test of progress? Indeed, No; for "Where wealth accumulates and *men decay*" the accumulation of wealth is an evidence not of progress, but of degeneration. It is only when converted into terms of manhood and womanhood that we can interpret justly the worth of the increase in the material resources of life. An unused tool may be a burden, worse than useless, because distinctly hampering life. This applies to every aspect of life. A child may

have too many complicated toys, and so be repressed instead of stimulated in activity and imagination. A school may be furnished too luxuriously. I have been in universities (it was never my fortune, good or bad, to teach in such an one) where the desks were so convenient, the chairs so invitingly comfortable, the whole environment so benumbingly over-rich, that the danger was the student would sit in his chair, put his feet on the desk, smoke his pipe and let it go at that. I question whether such a university will call out the iron energies of character and the vital leadership produced by the poorer, more meagrely equipped college of yesterday.

Thoreau tells us that while he was living at Walden Pond he one day picked up, in his ramble through the woods, three interesting pieces of stone, brought them home and placed them upon his desk. He discovered, however, that the three pieces of stone had

to be dusted every morning before the furniture of his mind was dusted, so he threw them out of the window in disgust. Few of us have the courage to do that with our *bric-à-brac*, and thus, unless we have a fire or are compelled to move across the continent, our houses get so overcrowded with meaningless stuff that in the end the man scarcely dares walk upright across the room for fear of shaking the china off the what-not.

Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote a charming poem, which is recited at many a high school graduation, on the *Chambered Nautilus*; telling how the little creature builds each year its larger dwelling, and urging man, too, to build the ever larger habitation, till only the blue sky shuts him from the Divine. It is a beautiful poem, and far be it from me to spoil it for anyone; yet I have always thought there are two sides to the Chambered Nautilus symbol. Af-

ter all, building each year its larger dwelling, the poor creature can live only in its front room while it must carry its whole house on its back. That being the case, would it not be better for the Chambered Nautilus if it could get rid of its unused rooms? So man must carry his whole house on his back: unless he can really live in all the rooms, might it not be better to reduce the size of his dwelling? The whole fabric of material equipment rests on the brain power and biological stuff of human nature: unless *all* the equipment can be servicably utilized for the purposes of life, it becomes a hampering weight limiting the freedom of the spirit.

Thus the reactionists, in all highly developed periods of civilization, have wished to go back to more primitive conditions of life. This is the significance in Rousseau's gospel of a return to the "noble savage." To be sure, the noble savage is viewed by Rousseau

from eighteenth century Paris and Fontainebleau, and would doubtless have looked very different had Rousseau sought him out in his native wilderness; yet the turning away from an over-refined civilization expresses a sincere hunger for the realities of the spirit of man and a desire to escape from the weight of things which can no longer be utilized for life and so hamper instead of helping the human spirit.

Edward Carpenter — a Rousseau of our day — writes similarly his charming essay on *Civilization: its Cause and Cure*, treating our vaunted material equipment as a disease. We do not share the mood of reaction of these men, but they compel us to recognize the serious problem in all our boasted progress. It is this: can man live in his house? Can he utilize this amazingly developed and ever-increasing equipment of civilization for the ends of his own

deeper life, and pass it all on, bettered by his use of it, to the next generation? The problem seems amusing when first stated, but grows in ominous import as we reflect upon it.

The situation in the larger world rests back, however, on the problem of the individual life that is the soul of the whole. The relation of man to the human equipment is, reduced to its lowest terms, the problem of the relation of *each man* to the tools and opportunities of his life. The character of the whole, in the last analysis, depends upon the character of the unit part. Public opinion is the sum or product of private opinions. To reform society is to make over the men and women who compose society. A sound relation of the world to its material tools merely expresses the combined harmony of individuals all rightly adjusted to the opportunities of life. A sound ethics is the soul of a

true sociology, instead of being a "pathological science" as certain arrogant, half-formed thinkers have held.

The heart of our problem is, then, in the individual life; and the need there is the consistent practice of the old Greek virtue of *Sophrosune*. This means more than temperance, which has come to have, in current usage, an unfortunately negative meaning. True temperance should mean, not abstinence or ascetic reaction, but a right use of things. The Greeks, except in the few men who came to be dominated by oriental influence, never exalted abstinence or made the mistake of opposing soul and body as respectively good and evil. They never regarded it as noble to macerate the flesh or blindly root out natural desires and capacities. They aspired toward right *proportion* in the different activities and relations of life; and indeed it is such right proportion that is needed. The obscuring of



that sound view by the ascetic reactions of certain teachings and epochs, not only resulted in unwise abandonment of life, but encouraged as well the opposite swing of the pendulum to the extremes of unrestricted sensual indulgence. The one type of failure is, in itself, as far from the true life as the other. Abandoning things is no more wise (though less ugly) than sinking into slavery to them. Temperance is usually as much better than abstinence as it is always more difficult. As a theory of life, asceticism leads to moral failure as truly as sensualism.

I do not refer here to asceticism as a means of self-discipline, and hence a valuable factor in moral education, but to the life-theory that blindly giving up opportunity and joy in the natural life is in itself virtue and pleasing to God — that there is an inevitable opposition between the spiritual and the natural life, the attainment of the one meaning the

abrogation of the other. This theory reaches its *reductio ad absurdum* in such words as these quoted approvingly by St. Jerome from the counsel of the saintly Paula: "A clean body and a clean dress mean an unclean soul." (*Letters, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. VI, p. 206.)

To choose an illustration a little further away: Mohammedanism gives a definite, if crude, statement of the theory in holding that if we will abstain from wine and certain pleasures of the senses in this world, we shall have a heaven of wine and *houris* in the next, with no day after and its headache. What shrewd man who believed the doctrine would not accept the contract!

Let me repeat then, the abandonment of things urged by asceticism is not the need; rather it is sound relation to things and the right use of them for the true aims of life, thus making the natural life the expression and instrument of the

spiritual. How beautiful the outer life is when it clothes as a fitting garment the life within. A graceful, active body is a much better instrument of the mind than an emaciated, distorted one. Cleanliness is better than dirt, strength than feebleness. The touch of the hand and glance of the eye are the natural language of friendship, while even the mystery of passion becomes the sweet vocabulary of a sanely-ordered love. All aspects of the natural life are thus sound and beautiful when in right relation to the deeper life of the spirit, clothing the latter as an expressive garment; it is only when this relation is broken and the outer life is sought as an end in itself that it becomes the source of evil.

Error, nevertheless, is much easier on one side of the balance than the other. If asceticism is as far from the truth as sensualism, it is far less appealing to the average human being. Where one

man unwisely abandons opportunity, a hundred become slaves to the things that should serve them: for one ascetic a hundred sensualists. The minds that temperamentally react against life are few; most of us easily turn the other way. In food and drink, dress, amusements, social habits, the common danger is that of slipping easily into subserviency to the comforts and luxuries of our existence, until we become the slaves of what should have been used wisely for the great ends of life.

Thus, while the law of temperance would be sufficient could man follow it perfectly, the weakness of human nature demands that it be supplemented for practical purposes by a further law — the law of heroism. This means seeing to it that man at every point is master, giving up, even unnecessarily, some of the things that serve him, to assure freedom and self-control. Since the normal temptation is chiefly on one side of

the balance, we must seek to correct it by bearing more heavily on the other side. This explains the practical value of asceticism, not as a life-theory, but as an element of education. To give up, even unnecessarily, something one might enjoy, just to be sure one is keeping the upper hand, is a most valuable, and in times like ours, almost indispensable element of self-discipline. If there is something you feel you could not do without, then *go without it*, just to be sure you could, if it be only a cup of coffee in the morning. Asceticism thus utilized becomes a sort of life-insurance of character; and that view should never be confused with the religious theory of giving up for the sake of giving up, as if blind self-mortification and self-sacrifice were, in themselves, virtue.

The measure of asceticism needed as moral discipline is in exact proportion to the ease and affluence of life. As the equipment of civilization increases and

becomes more refined, there is ever more danger of justifying Emerson's cry that "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind." As an individual or a family acquires greater wealth, there is need for ever more heroism. The man must keep his freedom, his domination of the tools that serve his own life, and the task is increasingly difficult as the equipment becomes richer and more complicated.

Poverty and affluence are thus both dangerous, though in different degree and kind, and neither is so desirable as just the fitting equipment of life, that is, the measure of resource that can readily and fully be used for the purposes of life. A measure of poverty often disciplines character admirably, calling out the iron in the blood and developing strength and independence. To this end, however, the strength and independence must be potentially present; and grinding poverty, acting on a weaker

blood, often instills bitterness and poisons the springs of character. The result thus depends on the nature of the individual and upon how he takes the experience. "All things work together for good to them that love God" (*Romans*, viii, 28), that is, to those who meet life with faith, cheerfulness and courage, and not to the other people.

We had at Stanford University, in the early days, a row of low, slight, frame buildings, called "the Camp," which had been hastily erected for the Chinese laborers at the time the first quadrangle of buildings was constructed. Rooms in the Camp were rented out at a nominal rate to poor students who were earning their own way,—cooking for themselves, making beds in the dormitory, waiting on table, cutting grass on the professors' lawns, or sometimes rising to the dignity of secretary work. I have watched two such boys, living

in adjoining rooms, going through the same experiences and meeting the same problems: the one growing stronger and finer every day, meeting troubles and deprivations with glad courage, earning the sweet fruit of character out of all the hardships; while the other became daily more resentful and bitter, brooded increasingly over the idea that his situation was unjust and that the world owed him a living, ending finally as a university "hanger-on," going from college to college as a disappointed parasite clinging to the work of others.

Thus it took strong, heroic elements of character to react soundly upon the exigency. To be developed by difficulty, the qualities of noble manhood had to be potentially present, together with a courageous, healthy attitude toward life. Extreme poverty is thus dangerous, tending often to develop the sordid views and petty standards — estimating all of life in terms of small



change — that characterize the morally weaker among the very poor.

However, just as the normal error is toward sensual indulgence rather than ascetic reaction, so affluence is more dangerous than poverty, since it tends to benumb and weaken character. Few human beings can safely be trusted to use wisely the opportunities of wealth without first being hardened in the school of enforced struggle and meagre environment. Even then, with a sudden access of wealth, deterioration of character often occurs. I suppose each of us dreams that if he were to receive such a sudden endowment of material power, his use of it would be sane and wise. A few of us might be so trusted; and if it comforts us, let us assume that you and I are of the few; but how about the others? The measureless opportunities in our country for the sudden discovery and exploitation of great natural resources have given sufficient

illustration. The amusingly tragic records of countless "Coal-oil Johnnies," who have passed from a conventional humdrum existence to a brief period of flaming debauch, show that even routine hardship may not sufficiently strengthen the character; while the frequent degeneracy into effeminate idleness or reckless self-indulgence of the children of those whose hard strength and sober industry have heaped up vast fortunes, indicates the principle involved. From the point of view of character, better than too little material equipment than too much: it takes a great, strong man to vitalize a wealth of tools or the tool of wealth with his own active strength, while the average character tends to inertness or indulgence under affluent conditions of life. Understand: wealth is admirable as power and opportunity, damning as master and seducer. It is not money, but the inordinate love and unwise use of money that is the root of

so much evil. Thus, as temperance is not enough, but must be completed by voluntarily accepted heroism, so a deliberate limiting of the material endowment of easy affluence is often desirable, at least for characters still in the formative period, to bring out the best result in manhood and womanhood.

Just here steps in a certain school of political economists to tell us that we are entirely wrong; that the progressive increase in material wants is the chief force in civilizing mankind; that careless expenditure in obedience to ever-expanding desires is the mainspring of progress; that the prime need is to keep money in circulation, the unbridled luxury of the individual thus being the greatest benefit to society. This theory is one of the most dangerous errors arising in economics, since it flatters a natural weakness of human nature, which, uncorrected, leads to terrible ruin in the end. It is a convenient and comfort-

ing sop to one's conscience to believe that in some blind fashion one's whimsical self-gratification works out to the benefit of the whole: thus this superstition has been a favorite and recurring one in the past; yet the price paid again and again has been as bitter as the error is tempting.

There is, to be sure, a measure of truth in the view that the development of wants means progress in civilization; but the growth, when helpful, is not simply the expansion and multiplication of desires: it is the development of *higher* wants, annulling in part the lower; involving the passing from one plane of life to another, substituting higher needs for the mere animal appetites of the brute man, or limiting these brute desires by the growth of those nobler wants that waken with the deepening and refining of the personal spirit. This process, however, is en-

tirely different from the multiplication of reckless expenditure and the creation of artificial material wants. The latter process is distinctly *not* progress, and the superstition that it is to be so taken is the misleading fallacy the evil of which I wish to show in the pages that follow.

To understand the nature of society, it is worth while resolving it, in theory, into its elements, as Plato did in his unrivalled discussion in the *Republic* long ago. As did he, let us imagine a group of, let us say, ten men, with their families, coming together to form an embryonic community. They would speedily discover the opportunity to economize time and strength if each man fulfilled one main task for the whole community. Let one till the ground, another build houses, another make shoes, another weave clothing for all in the little group. By such simple

division of labor all would live more easily and possess greater wealth earned in fewer hours of toil.

Now suppose that, through some accident of social caprice, a particular kind of shoes, made only by one man, should become more desirable — so much so that the other workers would be willing to give twice as much of their produce in exchange for them — what would happen? Why, in a short time a considerable portion of the accumulated production of the community would get into the hands of the shoemaker. Now suppose the shoemaker, in obedience to natural human desire, brings in another man, with the latter's family, to serve him, paying the newcomer with part of the higher exchange value of his shoes. Is it not evident that each of the original members of the commonwealth must work longer and harder than before, since he must produce enough in his own field for eleven families instead of ten?

Would it not be foolish to say that the shoemaker really supported his family of servants merely because the material with which to reward them happened to be in his hands?

Consider the illustration well, for it applies to the whole of our society. Accumulated wealth is power, representing the stored-up result of human labor acting upon Nature. Surely it is not necessary to argue that the present distribution of wealth is not ideally just. The power that wealth represents is often in the hands of unscrupulous, unsocial, capricious individuals merely from the accident of inheritance, social whim, or the fortunate proximity to some natural opportunity or monopoly. The conclusion is inexorable: all expenditure of the wealth that represents the garnered result of human labor, for what is distinctly useless or harmful, forces someone to work harder somewhere in the social structure. There

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is no escape from the logic of the argument. The process by which the result is worked out is tortuously complicated, and we need not here investigate it; but of the result there can be no doubt: those who spend the accumulated resources of society in useless and harmful luxury force some part of their fellow men and women to longer and harder labor. It is not the man who puts his hand into his pocket to pay an army of servants who really supports them. He does not raise the grain, fruits and animals converted into their food; he does not make their shoes nor weave their clothes. Someone does all this; and thus the diversion of human labor to useless and harmful luxury increases the pressure on those who are engaged in really productive and useful work. Since all means of life are produced or prepared solely through human effort, it is easy to increase the burden on those who have little power through



the misuse of power by those who have much. Easy to do this? Ah, our social structure is filled with shameless evidence of the bitter truth, to the point that all earnest thinking men and women, who love their fellows, are driven to a greater or less degree of reaction against the glaring injustice of our social and industrial system; and the crowning struggle of our time is to find the way out. If a way out is not found, in time the accumulated injustice becomes so intolerable that the sufferers, having nothing to lose but a meaningless existence of impossible toil, rise up in the blind madness of despair, and the social structure crumbles into revolution. Such is the price we pay for our pleasant superstition in the end.

We need not argue theoretically: history contains many illustrations of the hard truth of our thesis. Consider, for instance, the convincing illustration France has given in modern times. Be-

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fore the Revolution, the nobility of France had got into its own hands not only most of the land, but, as well, the power other accumulated wealth represents. As the laws of the state were made wholly from above, it was possible for the classes holding power to relieve themselves increasingly from productive activity and from bearing their just share of the nation's taxes. While there were many noble men and women and much helpful service was given from the motive of *noblesse oblige*, the tendency was dominantly selfish, until the burden resting upon the peasantry and artisan groups became unendurable. Poverty and misery increased ominously. Finally it became impossible to wring from the productive classes at the bottom of society sufficient wealth in taxes, rents and other emoluments to support the expanded wants and luxurious extravagance of the non-productive legion at the top. The state faced bankruptcy;

and so one financial scheme after another was tried in the vain effort to create a false semblance of the wanting prosperity — schemes for driving in the symptoms of the disease instead of curing the patient. Apparently, money was lacking; really, the wise, universal, coördinated, productive activity — the accumulated results of which money symbolizes — was lacking. The best-hearted of the aristocrats took the worst course, seeking by lavish expenditure to relieve the sufferings of the people, while succeeding only in converting more productive workers into servants and sycophants of the rich. Fine ladies, distressed at the misery of peasant girls, urged the buying of more lace, thus increasing the number of individuals turned to employments gratifying the luxury of the few instead of answering the needs of the many. The result of it all was — *The French Revolution* — a terrible cleansing by fire, in which a

mass of special privilege was burned away and the nation started afresh on a foundation of at least somewhat more general, coördinated, productive activity.

Now far be it from me to decry baldly the buying of lace: beautiful lace on a beautiful woman is a lovely thing and has its own artistic, *and therefore economic*, justification; but to imagine that "buying more lace" was really curing the poverty of the people was flattering selfishness with a superstition that had to be paid for at a terrible price. It is difficult to characterize strongly enough the folly and fallacy of imagining that reckless expenditure for luxury, by putting money into circulation, will cure the economic distress directly caused by the previous careless misuse of wealth and power by a class living chiefly for its own idle indulgence.

I grant there are times when it may be desirable and wise simply to buy more

lace, that is, to make work artificially for those who through "hard times"—disturbed and painful economic conditions—have lost opportunity to perform more simply productive labor. It is better to pay a man for sheerly useless work than to feed him on charity. There are times when it may even be wise to pay a man two dollars a day to carry a pile of stones across the road, and two dollars the next day to carry the same pile back again (only, to keep his self-respect, the laborer must suppose there is some advantage in removing the stones); but such expenditure is merely an opiate to relieve unbearable economic pain. Any wise physician will prescribe an opiate in certain diseases to relieve pain that is intolerable; but the opiate is merely to tide over the exigency and give the organism a chance to recuperate. To take morphine for bread produces results only too tragically well known. So in the life of society, to

relieve the pain of economic disease by temporarily making work through artificial expenditure may be a desirable, though always dangerous, expedient, giving the social organism a chance to recuperate; but to mistake such an economic opiate for the nourishing bread of productive labor is to invite just such tragic ruin as France experienced in the Revolution.

It is unnecessary to multiply historic illustrations: the same clear strand runs through the complicated web of economic relations in ancient Roman society in the period of its decline, and in many a lesser cataclysm in the rise and fall of the tides of life. The principle is of universal application. Not the least impressive example is clearly evident in our American life. Preceding every financial and business depression our country has experienced in recent decades has been invariably a period of extravagant living. This was notably true

before the last panic (1907). All classes of the people had been for some years obviously living beyond their means. I do not mean that in all cases they were spending money that literally had not been earned, though that was often true; but that the proportion of expenditure to income was foolishly extravagant. The era of prosperity seemed endless; and it was to the interest of nearly everyone to inculcate in all others the superstition that it would not end. Nearly everyone discounted the future, spending on the anticipated earnings of to-morrow; and this folly was encouraged by many a trusted leader of the people, on the ground that general good would result therefrom. Manufactured articles were produced in excess of the demand on the assumption that the demand must steadily increase, as had been true for some years past. The newspaper jests regarding men who mortgaged their homes in order to buy automo-

biles were only too sadly true of the facts.

Then came the crash: a slight disturbance of business confidence, due to minor causes, such as a few striking bank failures, and the panic was on. Money disappeared from circulation; the demand for manufactured articles dropped away down; mercantile and industrial concerns were crippled or compelled to suspend operations. The reckless purchasers of automobiles, referred to above, in some instances had not money enough to buy gasoline with which to run their machines, while the mortgages on their homes were being foreclosed. From the powerful the pressure descended rapidly to the poor, until the lessened activity forced thousands out of employment and left them and their families stranded in misery and want. People everywhere exclaimed: "How terrible the loss of public confidence! Let everybody shout for good times.



We need a new currency law that will furnish an expansive medium of exchange and keep money in circulation."

It is true, that in our complicated industrial life the currency problem is an important one, requiring the best brains of economists and statesmen for its progressive solution; but in relation to the deeper issues involved in such a condition of business paralysis it is the merest incident. Men say, in such a time, that money is needed: really the need is for the sober and productive activity and the wise proportioning of expenditure to income, that permit the accumulation of resources of which money is merely the symbol.

There are two causes of a panic. The immediate or initiating cause is a sudden shock to public confidence, and this, while apparently all-important, is relatively incidental. The deeper cause is extravagant living, unwise discounting of the future, rotten business conditions

that have persisted unseen for a long time — all action in obedience to the superstition of “good times” that prosperity will continue and increase without limit.

All business proceeds on a basis of mutual trust: not that we believe in each other entirely — far from it; but that we are confident the majority of our associates mean to do the reasonably just and right thing. Now let some sudden shock to this mutual trust occur, coming perhaps from a slight initiating cause — a startling business failure, an unimportant disturbance of international relations, or what not, but spreading rapidly from mind to mind: immediately we all begin to draw back, to refuse credit and hold on to our available cash; banks refuse their ordinary accommodations,—in a word, all our customary devices for discounting the future and trading in advance on the prosperity we hope may come are suddenly cut off. The result

is as inevitable as it is swift in coming: all that has been rotten for so long is suddenly shown to be rotten; the drafts we have drawn on an imagined but impossible future prosperity come due and must be paid; the disease that had been so carefully concealed within the economic body suddenly breaks out onto the surface with all its painful symptoms.

To suppose that the influence which has brought the disease to the surface is its true cause is childishly to misread the whole situation. The shock to public confidence *initiated* the period of distress, it did not *cause* it; and the longer the shock was postponed, granted that the extravagant living and unwise business activity continued, the greater must be the distress when the shock came. In other words, the longer you allow an accumulating debt to run, the heavier must be the payment; the longer you play a losing game, the bigger is the loss;

the extent to which you continue a business that is really a failure, the larger is the ruin in the end.

Thus a panic is not an unmitigated evil: it is in reality a clearing-house in which we pay our bad debts. It is only in "good times" that a business which is really running behind can apparently succeed. Then, by unwarrantably anticipating the future, borrowing from one to pay another, the real failure can be covered up and an appearance of prosperity and growth be put on; but when "hard times" come, such deception is no longer possible. The disease that was present all the time is forced to the surface; what was rotten all along is suddenly shown to be rotten.

Granted that the disease was present in the social organism, is it not better to have it come to the surface? Might not a juggling with the medium of exchange, which covered up the disease and made possible a postponing of the

issue, do incalculable harm? The pity, of course, of the acute form of the disease is that the innocent suffer with the guilty. Not only is the business that is really a failure forced to the wall, but with it is often overwhelmed that which is ordinarily successful, which, if the disturbed condition could only be bridged over, would continue on an honest basis. This, after all, is only what is true of human life generally. We cannot escape from each other even if we try; the good or bad fortune of each must affect his neighbors as well as himself. Just as a physical epidemic, starting in the careless uncleanness of a few, will spread to an innocent multitude, so is it with the diseases affecting the social organism. Thus our common suffering is merely one consequence of our being, whether or not we wish the task, "our brother's keeper."

The true cause of a time of industrial depression and general distress points

the way to the right remedy : saner living and just proportioning of expenditure and income, use and production. In place of advocating this thorough-going remedy, however, the people who proclaim the loss of public confidence to be the cause of the distress shout loudly that the great need is to restore mutual trust by some device of an expanded currency. They condemn as public enemies all who look forward soberly to the inevitable long period of depression and refuse to go forward blindly in the career of reckless production and expenditure, and they hope thus to create artificially anew the vanished epoch of apparent prosperity. Now it is all very well to whistle to keep up your courage; but when you have to pass through a forest of fallen trees on a dark night, the wise course is not to shut your eyes and run blindly forward. Courageous running is a good thing in its place, but not in the above circumstances.

Thus, if, in time of panic, we say that the country has vast resources scarcely touched, that the recuperative power of the people is immense, that sobriety, thrift and industry will show large returns and cause the temporary distress quickly to pass away, we are well within the bounds of truth and are meeting the issue wisely; but if we ignore the deeper causes of our suffering — extravagant living and careless luxury, if we proclaim that blind confidence and an expanded currency alone are needed, that an increased tension of feverish living is all that is required to correct the disease caused by the same course of action in the past; then we are treating the symptoms instead of the patient, we are driving in the disease only to make it more terrible when it inevitably does break out at last.

An equally foolish superstition is to charge economic distress and credit prosperity wholly to the political party that

happens to be in power at the time. This illusion is fostered by demagogues of all parties, since it serves conveniently their selfish aims. How many times the American people have thus been blindfolded and led by the nose: business depression being used to frighten them into granting power to those who would exploit them! That bad legislation can do considerable harm and good legislation may help somewhat, everyone knows; but to suppose that economic conditions resulting from the habit of life of the people over a long period of time are due wholly to political devices and party control is to obscure the issue to the point of inviting greater disaster.

Goethe, with his shrewd and profound wisdom, saw rightly the whole problem and satirized unmercifully the false prophets in the paper-money episode of the *Second Part of Faust*. He portrays the larger world of the Empire as cursed by the same life of lawless and aimless



caprice previously studied in the little world of the *First Part*. The emperor neglects his function of just governing for the sake of the whimsical pleasures of the moment. The whole court, with all the officials of the Empire, takes the cue and follows the same capricious course. The dry rot of foolish living descends through all orders of society: the merchant neglects his business, the laborer and the farmer his task. The result is extreme distress and disorder. The treasury is bankrupt, "bread already eaten" is served at the imperial table, the means of life are wanting in all grades of society, while crimes of all sorts abound and multiply. The Empire is on the verge of revolution.

Along comes Mephistopheles, symbol of the life of utter non-reason, that is, aimless caprice, since the field is ripe for him. His diagnosis is as simple as it is sophistical: the Empire needs money; were there plenty of money all would

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have the means to procure the necessities, comforts and luxuries of life. Well, there is plenty of gold in the ground — even of the buried treasure that is legally the property of the emperor. Why not issue paper notes on this buried treasure and distribute them universally? If their validity is questioned, one need only dig up some of the treasure to prove that one could dig more. Thus the standard of the currency will be maintained and all will live in ease and luxury. Could one invent a better scheme for an expanded currency to cure economic distress? It is the devil's scheme, indeed; but how many have been caught by it in varied forms in the past! (and the present?)

The plan is put into execution in the jugglery of the masquerade night. The notes are signed by the emperor, multiplied by the presses and spread broadcast. Booming prosperity is the appar-

ent immediate result. Since everyone can buy, everyone can sell, and feverish business activity recommences. Mephistopheles and his pupil are the heroes of the hour. The butcher sells his meat and buys bread and cake; the merchant disposes of his stock and carelessly purchases all that his whims demand; the courtiers again enjoy the listless life of luxury; the treasury is filled and the emperor embarrassed with superfluous wealth.

Is it any wonder that, drunk with new-found power to gratify every caprice, the emperor is seized with his supreme whim and demands of Faust that Helena, symbol of the absolute beauty achievable only at the end of the long road of toiling art, be immediately called forth from the realms of the dead that are ever-living, since born of the creative imagination, merely to give a half-hour's diversion to the *blasé* court? Ah, how the fashionable, luxury-loving

world always misconceives art and patronizingly attaches it as an adorning fringe to an already meaningless existence!

Faust, here the inspired artist, takes the task seriously: armed with the key of the artist's insight and the tripod of his wisdom, he descends to the world of uncreate energies and vaguely vast powers — the Mothers — from whose bosom the perfectly limited forms of art are born, and calls Helena and Paris again to their love-making on the visionary stage of time. Faust alone knows that art is serious business, to be undertaken reverently or not at all. The courtiers pass their pleasant, patronizing comments on the scene before them. The ladies are pleased with the youthful bloom of Paris but find Helena faded and *passé*. The gentlemen dislike the peasant roughness of the youth, but, as one of them puts it, would be quite content with the "fair remains" of Hele-

na's beauty. Little short of insulting are both lords and ladies in supercilious, unwarranted superiority to the beauty they ought humbly to revere. Read it, friends, this *Second Part of Faust* that nobody reads these days and that, difficult it is true, surpasses in its particular insight anything else in literature.

The court-fool is, in Goethe's portrayal, almost the only wise man in the imperial circle. He takes his five thousand dollars, picked up from the careless droppings of others, and uses them to buy, far from the court, land he can stand erect on when his foolish superiors go down in the crash.

And the crash comes — implacably! In a little while the surplus production of past industry is consumed; the entire society has been using carelessly the new-found opportunity to gratify its whims and desires, instead of engaging in sober, productive labor; soon the paper notes decline and then lose all value

and will no longer purchase anything, since the fact that they symbolize no reality of labor and production has been forced home on all by the rise in prices and disappearance of the commodities of life. The ensuing distress proved tenfold worse than anything that existed before.

You see, in the devil's cure, they treated the symptoms but accentuated the cause of the disease. It seemed, as I have pointed out, that money was wanting, but what really was wanting was the regular, continuous industry and wise relation of expenditure to income that create and accumulate that of which money is the convenient symbol. Only for a short time can the cleverest political deception maintain the exchange value of a symbol that no longer symbolizes anything. Thus to create the symbol without the thing it stands for, as in the paper-money scheme, meant surely that the symbol would signify

nothing in the end. Whatever makes possible the satisfaction of human desires without constructing the basis on which such satisfaction normally and reasonably rests is unmitigatedly bad in its effect on the individual and on society alike. It is this Mephistopheles accomplished for the empire as it was this he achieved for Faust in the little world of the *First Part*, with ruinous consequences in both cases; and it is just this that has been attained by Mississippi Bubbles and other John Law schemes, paper-money devices, lessening by governmental action the true value of the medium of exchange, Roman imperial largesses to the people, buying more lace in the pre-revolutionary days in France, devices for juggling the currency and creating a false semblance of prosperity in panic times in America.

No! that is not the way out: it is truly the devil's scheme — the further stimulating and gratifying of caprice that

is the opposite of reason. The only true and lasting cure for the economic disease, the acute symptoms of which appear in "hard times," is in sober, industrious labor, wisely simple living, the sane proportioning of expenditure, with a rejection of useless and harmful luxury.

I do not in the least mean that life should be denuded of beauty and reduced to the answering of bare physical needs. On the contrary, beauty is the most useful thing on earth, as the ideal is the most practical. There are some things for which one cannot spend too freely, in money, time, strength and even life itself. The problem is one of wise proportion, and I must frankly admit that no hard and fast rule can be laid down. This is only what is true of all aspects of life: it is easy to live by rule and useless to do so; it is hard to adjust life artistically to its ever fresh opportunity, but that is life and the end is worth the cost.



Thus no exact definition of useless and harmful luxury can be given, though it is easy to give examples of extreme cases. A sybaritic banquet with bewildering temptations to over-indulgence in food and drink is useless and harmful luxury. To spend forty thousand dollars in a year for a society woman's gowns, as the plaintiff in a recent, much exploited divorce case claimed to be necessary, is useless and harmful luxury. To bewilder one's children on Christmas Eve with "twenty-three Christmas trees illuminated with electric lights," as was proudly reported not long ago of a family of the over-rich, is, to say nothing of spoiling the children, useless and harmful luxury. To give a dinner — "the table loaded with a profusion of the most costly tropical flowers, live butterflies being released at a certain point in the *menu* to flit about the blossoms," is useless and harmful luxury. A man who smokes twenty fifty-cent cigars in a day

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is indulging in useless and harmful luxury.

On the other hand, it is a pity every smoker should not try, at least once in his life, a twenty-five-cent cigar (it is possible to make them larger but not better in quality) just to have the experience. The lover who sends a bunch of hot-house roses to his best-beloved, purchasing the flowers at the price of foregoing several meals, is not guilty of useless and harmful luxury, but displays rather the higher wisdom that knows when not to count the cost. The family among my friends who pinched and scraped that they might buy a particularly beautiful antique bedroom set for their decade-long inhabited sleeping-room, showed the same wisdom. The college student who foregoes various pleasures that he may have funds enough to obviate the need of taking a roommate and pay freely for a comfortable room he can occupy alone, evidences the

same understanding of the art of life. Thus one must learn to forego the lower desires for the sake of the higher, and even to spend without calculation for the truly great things of life. Indeed, if prudence is the law in nine circumstances out of ten in human life, heroic imprudence is the law in the rare tenth case, beginning just at the point where prudence ceases to be virtue and becomes cowardice. Ordinarily, we must save our money, time, strength carefully; yet these are but a means and not an end, and there comes a time when the call of one's faith, love, country, friend, of the cause in which one believes, is so supreme that to stop and count the cost is cowardly and one must freely give all — even to life itself — for that which is absolutely worth while. Thus to know when not to count the cost, but to give all, freely, is the high-water mark of wisdom. So in the right use of the human equipment that is our means of

life, to spend is as necessary as to save, and only the constantly given time and effort to attain a wise proportioning to the ends of life of the means available will solve progressively the problem. Life must be crowned with art and science, the useful must wear the garment of the beautiful, the loftiest spiritual goods must bless life and transfigure its meaning. Thus, far from denuding life of beauty or starving the higher desires, the need is to spend most for the things best worth while, less for what is of lower import, and for useless and harmful luxury to spend not at all.

All this presupposes limited means demanding wisdom and care for their just proportioning to the ends of life. The accidents and faults of our present civilization, however, have produced a crowd of the over-rich whose hands are glutted with excess of power. The pity of great wealth is that there is so little one can do with it with assured help-

fulness. It must be a terrible thing to have vast wealth — and a tender conscience; fortunate those of us who are spared the ordeal! Difficult indeed is it to give the wealth away without harming the recipient. If you endow a university, you run the risk of emasculating its earnestness and making it time-serving in spirit. If you give lavishly to a church, you may make its members less devoted to that to which they owe service. If you donate libraries, you may lower the self-respect and initiative of the communities receiving them. If you give freely to aid individuals, you discover how few can accept the gift and keep their manhood, and you may increase the list of weaklings depending upon the resources of others. If you establish a great educational fund, you give to many a college president the notorious extended palm and well-known pose of the medicants of southern Europe. If you build homes and villages

for your working-men, they are apt to resent your patronage and often prefer to herd in squalor in order to keep their freedom and self-direction. If you endow a museum or leave your money to charity, the result may be to create a host of sinecures and parasites. If you spend your wealth for careless self-indulgence, we have seen how this debauches the individual and works harm to the social whole. If you allow the wealth to go on progressively accumulating, it threatens the welfare of your children and may become a menace to society.

Not that these results are inevitable: there is always a wise way to use the greatest wealth; but to find and travel the way is indeed a perplexing problem. Truly the way of the wealthy is hard, and it remains, without jesting, difficult for the very rich man to get into the heaven of the spirit.

Meantime, we others need not con-

gratulate ourselves overmuch: whether the resource be little or large, the right proportioning of the expenditure is a problem of never-ending difficulty. To that problem we must give ourselves with earnest reverence. There should be a wise and thoughtful regulation of all our activities and of the use of that measure of power which our own labor or the accident of circumstances has placed in our hands. It is not a barren material life nor one sodden with luxury that is desirable; but that money and the power it represents should be used so that it may be converted into the best life for one in harmony with the best life for all.

For that best life there must be a true simplification of our existence — not that false simple life that is a pleasing novelty between two chapters of debauch, but a return from the adventitious to the real, from things on the surface to those at the heart. Instead of living

to the accident of the social type about us, striving blindly to get bigger houses and a greater quantity of tasteless stuff to fill them, to dress our children more extravagantly than our neighbors, to move into the next street of aristocratic snobbishness and then into the next, the need is that we should learn to care for the great simple realities and live in them — for love and work and little children, for the hunger to gain wisdom and appreciate beauty, for the desire to be of use to others and add our mite to the welfare of the whole. Then will the mass of distracting material interests drop away, the gratification in senseless luxury seem cheap and unsatisfying, and the accident of the social atmosphere no longer seduce us to our own corruption.

It is not the merely "strenuous" life that is needed. Our worship of mere effectiveness, without asking the moral worth of the ends it achieves, if better than the way of slothful indulgence, is



nevertheless one of the grave errors of our time. We are in danger of exalting with Carlyle the merely strong man, of mistaking for constructive action a feverish getting over the face of the earth and the waters — a sort of aimless jiggling. No, it is not arrogant strenuousness, it is wisdom, balanced sanity, calm and thoughtful conduct dedicated to the upbuilding of the noblest manhood and womanhood, that is needed.

Our society is cursed with an unthinking materialism that is multiplied as it is echoed from one to another. Much of our society seems money-mad in the blind struggle to acquire more material things. How few really formulate consciously independent ideals of life and live consistently to them! Human beings are caught in the current of the crowd and live as their neighbors live. It is not that they really love the accumulation of stuff they cannot use and

the satiating of ever-expanding materialistic desires; it is that they echo what is dominant in the society about them. It is a protest in action and life against this that is needed. "We needs must love the highest when we see it." People are more ready than we dare to believe to respond to what is worth while — to those grandly simple realities out of which life is always made and which alone answer the deepest hunger of the human spirit.

It is thus in the fact that "no man liveth to himself alone" that the deepest significance of the problem of luxury lies. The action of each one affects in its own way the welfare of all. The wise use of the power in one's hands tends in its own slight degree to correct the evil of an immoral social order and make for a saner world. Yet here, even the most powerful of us is conscious rather of his impotence. What can one man do? His unconventional action

seems only to hamper himself, his foregoing of selfish indulgence seems of no significance in lessening the burden on those at the bottom, his influence on the social destiny appears too slight to be worth consideration. Ah, the answer is simple: it is not only the direct action that helps, but the contagion of the ideal inspiring it. No man can know to the full the influence of his life on the minds and hearts of his fellows. As foolish display and selfish extravagance are contagious, so, in far higher measure, is a life wisely ordered and consistently devoted to noble aims. One family, in the midst of a luxury-loving, materialistic society, living steadily to an ideal of simple and earnest life, is a moral leaven of incalculable import. Even Sodom and Gomorrah might have been saved if the patriarch who prayed for them had believed enough in a sufficiently small minority of the good.

Thus in a twofold way all power is

indeed obligation. In the solidarity of human life, neither in its direct result nor in the contagion of its inspiration, can any action be indifferent: each affects the whole for good or evil, and it is our business to see to it that the result is good. Hence all possession, great or small, of the means of life, is just so much responsibility to use the power for life's sake and not for the sake of selfish indulgence; and of one thing we may be sure: *nothing can ever be economically desirable that is morally wrong.*

To dare, in a society such as ours, to disregard conventions that merely hamper life; to have done with useless and harmful luxury; to refuse to dedicate one's life to the accumulation of material things; to avoid all display dictated by selfish vanity; to cherish friendship rather than society, beauty and not adornment, reality and never appearance; to hold wealth as obligation and all opportunity as duty; to seek only

what is truly worth while and to seek that always with all one's might — that not only redeems one's own life, but contributes a moral leaven that helps, beyond our hopes, to lift the heavy and inert mass of society.



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